

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL BRIEFING: Edinburgh's ongoing response to the Ukraine crisis

This briefing summarises actions we've taken to date in the Council's and city's ongoing response to the crisis. We hope you find it useful for responding to questions you may receive from your constituents/residents.

Around 85-90% of all arrivals to Scotland are coming in through the city, which is increasingly seeing Edinburgh's Welcome Hub become the entry point for Scotland.

We are aware of increasing numbers of people applying for visas and selecting to come to Scotland. This will impact on our services and infrastructure, putting a great strain on our already stretched resources, particularly in the summer months when the city is already full to capacity.

We are liaising closely with Scottish Government over the implications and requirements which will be needed to sustain this support in the longer term.

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Sources of information

Please check our website www.edinburgh.gov.uk/ukraine, which includes further information for:

- Ukrainian people with [links to visa information, how to get to Scotland and other sources of support](#)
- residents who wish to [host Ukrainian refugees, donate or volunteer](#)

We are currently the only Scottish local authority translating documents and information on our website into Ukrainian.

Enquiries

Should you have any additional questions which are not covered here or on our website, please use our [online request form](#) so that we can track responses and develop a 'response' bank and respond as efficiently as possible. We are getting a very high volume of enquiries, but we will get back to you as quickly as we can (please don't send multiple enquiries about the same issue – thanks for your understanding.)

Please note:

- Requests from constituents wishing to host Ukrainian people should be directed to the [hosting Ukrainian refugees information](#) on our website which links to the Government's online applications.
- [Visa applications](#): the Council is not involved in processing visa applications, nor do we have any influence on the government teams handling applications.

Welcome arrangements

Welcome Hub – Gogarburn

Since March, we have welcomed more than 2,500 refugees through Edinburgh's Welcome Hub, which we established with partner agencies in Gogarburn at the RBS/NatWest campus. The Hub involves a huge, combined effort from both volunteers and Council teams.

Feedback from people using the facility has been very positive. Located in a peaceful and secluded area close to the airport, the Hub offers some respite after long and difficult journeys reaching Edinburgh, with medical assistance from the NHS available.

- We provided free transport is provided from the airport to the Hub and arranged from Edinburgh bus and train stations where required, 24 hours a day.
- We encourage all arrivals, irrespective of scheme, to visit so that we can provide them and their host families with any support/guidance they may need and monitor safeguarding of arrivals. The safety and wellbeing of refugees remains paramount
- From the Welcome Hub we organise onward travel to, for example, hotel or host accommodation. For people on the Homes for Ukraine and Super Sponsor scheme, we provide the first part of their £200 resettlement grant as well as welcome information packs.
- Links are made and coordinated where appropriate for wider professional support across Council, such as with health and social care partners, education, voluntary/third sector, and specialist support.
- The rucksacks we hand out – filled with initial donations of essential items such as toiletries – are well-received and special rucksacks with teddies are provided to children. We also have a supply of baby accessories including baby boxes, buggies, prams, and car seats.
- The initial welcome at the airport is managed by Volunteer Edinburgh with a team of volunteers who so far have dedicated close to 4,000 hours to provide a warm and supportive welcome to people arriving at all hours of the day and night. They are also co-ordinating the rucksacks and other donations. Volunteer Edinburgh has received no additional funding for this invaluable support.

Welcome signage and displays

Prominent visual 'Welcome to Edinburgh' branding has been produced and is on display in Edinburgh Airport, Edinburgh bus station and Waverley train station, signposting arrivals to the contact helpline should they need support. This includes roller banners, postcards and display screen information in English and Ukrainian.

Helpline

We've set up a 24-hour helpline (in the Council's customer contact team) for Ukraine arrivals coming to stay in the Edinburgh area. The line is very busy, averaging over 50 calls a day. The team is working closely with the welcome hub, Volunteer Edinburgh and other partners to provide a 'triage' service to support refugees who need immediate help. This helpline is used particularly by the increasing number of people arriving at the Waverley rail and Edinburgh bus stations.

Council customer hub drop and other ongoing support

The UK/Scottish welfare system is designed to help people who are facing financial hardship, or who have specific needs. People coming to Scotland through the Scottish Government's Super Sponsor or UK Government's Homes for Ukraine schemes will be able to seek and take up employment.

As an extension of the Welcome Hub, the Council's customer contact team is providing a specialist drop-in facility at 249 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1YJ. People collect the remainder of their £200 settlement payment here as well as get help and advice on benefits, housing, and other support to help them settle into living in the Edinburgh area. We are recruiting Ukrainian-speaking customer contact advisors, including from people displaced by the conflict in Ukraine.

This operates Monday to Friday, 10am-12noon and 2-4pm, with an interpreter present. The Council's Advice Shop and DWP operate drop-in support on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Since opening in April, we have had over 2,000 visits to our customer/advice hub and over 2,750 helpline calls. A 'no wrong door' approach has been mapped across our employability networks to ensure that every Ukrainian arrival in the city is supported with benefit claims, vulnerable family support, job clubs and access to Ukrainian friendly jobs. The [Edinburgh Guarantee](#) is also being used as an entry point.

DWP continues to provide dedicated support to people from Ukraine, working directly with people through Job Centres as well as at joint events with the Council, the Edinburgh Ukrainian social club and other partners.

Accommodation

Following the city's initial emergency response to ensure Edinburgh provides a safe and warm welcome. For people arriving on the Super Sponsor Scheme, we initially provide accommodation in hotel rooms, using the providers negotiated by Scottish Government, or other temporary locations in Edinburgh which our Homeless team use on a regular basis.

The situation with hotel accommodation remains fluid as availability of rooms change, particularly in relation to other demands on hotel accommodation as we approach the peak tourist and festival period.

Our team keeps in regular contact with people living in hotels or temporary accommodation, updating on any potential moves to other hotels or to hosts. We are careful to explain changes in circumstances with hotel accommodation, explain where a move is voluntary, and so on.

We continue to source accommodation for people staying locally but housing options are under severe pressure. We are working closely with neighbouring local authorities and the Scottish Government on additional options. Ukrainian people may if they wish find their own rented accommodation.

Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme

COSLA has taken on the role of 'matching' people who arrive under the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme (not already matched through the Homes for Ukraine scheme) to accommodation.

The Council started to receive details of hosts w/b 23 May 2022 and is matching people as quickly as possible with the hosts after property.

As the Super Sponsor scheme has taken a little longer to come into operation, people have been living in the hotel or temporary accommodation longer than we'd like/anticipated. In some instances, they have built connections with other people in the accommodation. We understand that some have expressed a desire to continue to live in the same accommodation going forward. If people are here either through the Homes for Ukraine or the Super Sponsor Scheme, they will be rehomed with a host as per the design of the schemes. It is not viable to have people to continue to live in their new 'community' in temporary accommodation nor the hotel accommodation arranged by Scottish Government on a longer-term basis.

Break down of host scheme arrangements

If people's host scheme has broken down or they are here on another visa scheme, the Council's housing officers will support them to apply for permanent accommodation as would be the case for any homeless people in Edinburgh. This is in line with the Scottish Government's guidelines to councils. On a temporary basis, we will support people to move to the temporary hotel accommodation as we look for more permanent options.

Ending of host arrangements

Hosts and people staying with them are already raising with us questions about what happens after the six-month host arrangement ends. We are trying to seek answers from Scottish Government on this.

Host payments

We have contacted hosts who registered under either the Homes for Ukraine Scheme or Super Sponsor programme to process payments.

If someone has not yet been contacted by us, please ask them to complete their details on our secure online form www.edinburgh.gov.uk/ukrainianhostpayment. The information supplied will of course be held securely within Council systems.

Education

We're arranging places for early years and schools, with over 100 children and young people already supported into education.

As school places across the city are already under pressure in certain areas, an approach to allocating places has been designed to take into consideration the need to place refugee children from other countries as well.

While the enrolment process is devolved to schools, where the catchment school is full and cannot accommodate additional pupils, we advise parents/carers where school places are available in other areas of the city.

When children are enrolled in a school, families can apply for a [National Entitlement Card](#). Ukrainian applications will be fast tracked.

With support from charities, electronic devices such as laptops and iPads are being provided to student aged arrivals to ensure they can continue studies in Ukrainian.

Volunteer organisations

The response from residents and businesses has been enormously generous. EVOG and Volunteer Edinburgh are leading on a strategic approach to co-ordinating this goodwill and the work of third sector groups in the city.

These efforts are focused around four main themes – food, ESOL/translation, transport, and the volunteer 'taskforce', including volunteers at the airport and welcome hub.

Alongside resident and local community efforts, some examples of donations include:

- free tickets to key Edinburgh attractions, including the Castle and the Zoo, Visitor Attractions Group (Capital Group)
- passes to Edinburgh Leisure centres
- toiletries from Boots
- shoes from Clarks
- office space for welcome hub from NatWest
- office space for donations collection from Edinburgh Tattoo.

The Ukrainian Club on Royal Terrace has become an invaluable point of community support and communications for people when they settle, with regular coffee mornings/events at which the Council, DWP, Scottish Government and other partners attend to give advice and support. The club is also co-ordinating much of the donation distribution locally and with deliveries to Poland for displaced people.

We have also been working with partners to support the Dnipro Children's charity, a Hibs Supporters Group, which has had a relationship with children's homes in Dnipro since 2005. The charity arranged to bring 52 children and six house mothers to Scotland. We are providing ongoing support, including education and health, in partnership with the Dnipro Charity and Edinburgh College.

Civic response

We maintain supportive relationships with and respond to appeals from our counterparts in Edinburgh's twin cities Kyiv and Krakow.

Following an appeal to the Lord Provost from Kyiv to help protect their monuments and statues, and in a show of ingenuity and collaboration between ten different organisations, over 3,000 sandbags were sourced and transported on an easyJet flight from Edinburgh to Krakow.

We also worked with a Scottish charity, Sunflower Scotland, to send over 10,000 more sandbags – this time to Kharkiv – along with a ton of potatoes, on the city's request. A shipment of shoes has also been made to Kyiv.

In an ongoing display of solidarity, the Ukrainian flag continues to fly above the City Chambers while the Granton gasholder remains illuminated in blue and yellow.